



Jason Merrille and Sara Stewart in *Out Cry* PHOTOGRAPH NIEL LISBERT

Reviews

Out Cry

Lyric, Hammersmith

Originally known as *The Two Character Play*, Tennessee Williams's *Out Cry* was the product of feverish obsession. He constantly reworked it in the early seventies and even called it "my most beautiful play since *Streetcar*". But, although Timothy Walker's *Check* by José production at the Lyric Hammersmith is clearly a labour of love, it's hard to agree with Williams's judgment. It feels like a work that mattered more to its author than it does even to the most sympathetic observer.

Williams transmutes his own predicament into that of a therapist brother and sister, Felice and Clare. On tour in some boondock hellhole, they wind up in an empty theatre abandoned by their company, their manager and eventually their audiences. But they persist in acting out a melodramatic play that seems to mirror their situation: they assume the role of immersed and once-institutionalised siblings living in mortal fear of the outside world after an act of parental slaughter. Fantasy and reality finally merge as this tortured twosome seek in art a resolution that has been denied them in life.

You can see why the play meant a lot to Williams: it was the product of a hellish decade in which he suffered drug dependency, the death of a lover, committal to a psychiatric hospital and a declining artistic reputation. But desperation alone doesn't make for good drama, and Williams never creates a strong reality against which we can measure the siblings' lapse into desolate fantasy.

If the piece is worth reviving, it is largely as a vehicle for actors. And Walker's emotion-charged production, played out against a meta-theatrical Nick Ormerod design, gets two so-bald-headed performances. Sara Stewart leads Clare a distracted, wild-eyed sensuality that suggests the world one day make a fine Blanche Dubois, and Jason Merrille as the muscular, be-wigged Felice persuasively embodies the more stringent side of Williams that believed in the compulsion to work. But although the play has echoes of

Pirandello and Beckett and argues that theatres are ultimately prisons for both actors and dramatists, it never convinces us that we too are as entrapped and entombed as Williams's symbolic siblings.

Michael Billington

See Nov 17 (0145-74 231)

Ballegangaire

Royal Court, London

You can't help wondering if Martin McDonagh caught a performance of *Ballegangaire* when it was produced by Druid Theatre in Galway back in 1985. Watching the first act of this story of an senile old woman, Mommo, tormenting her desperate



Billington Guardian Out Cry



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